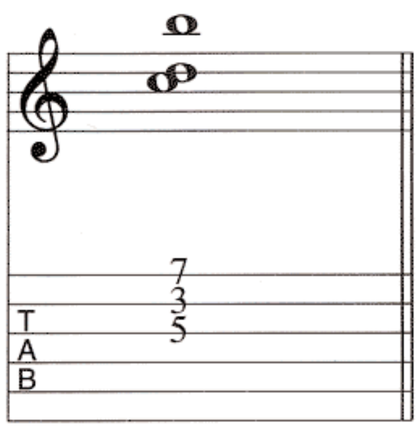
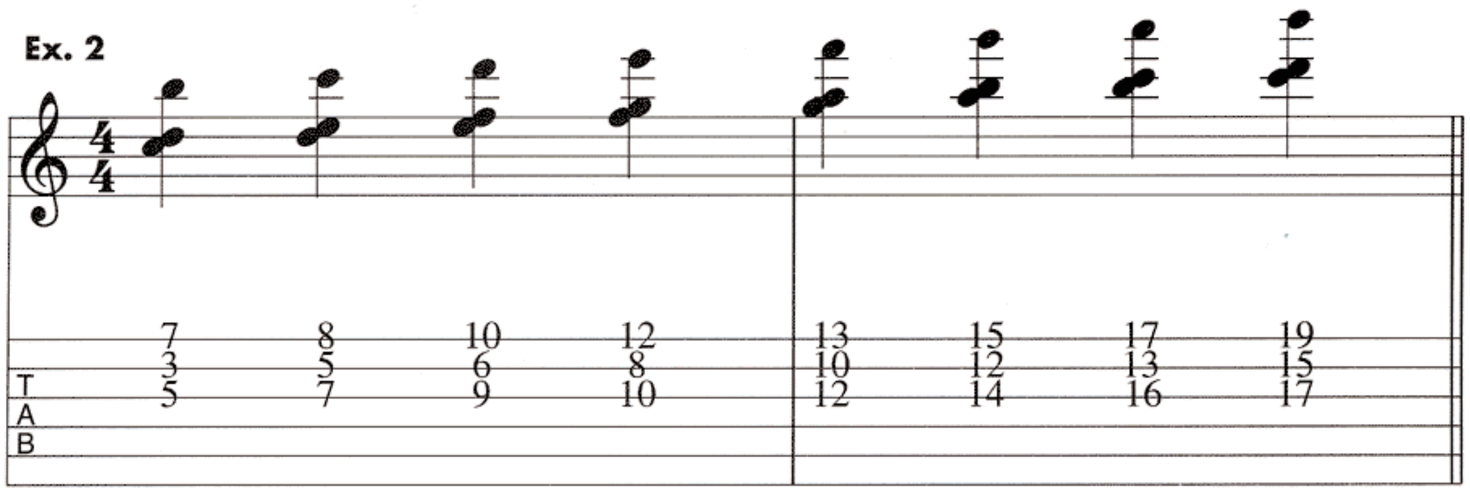
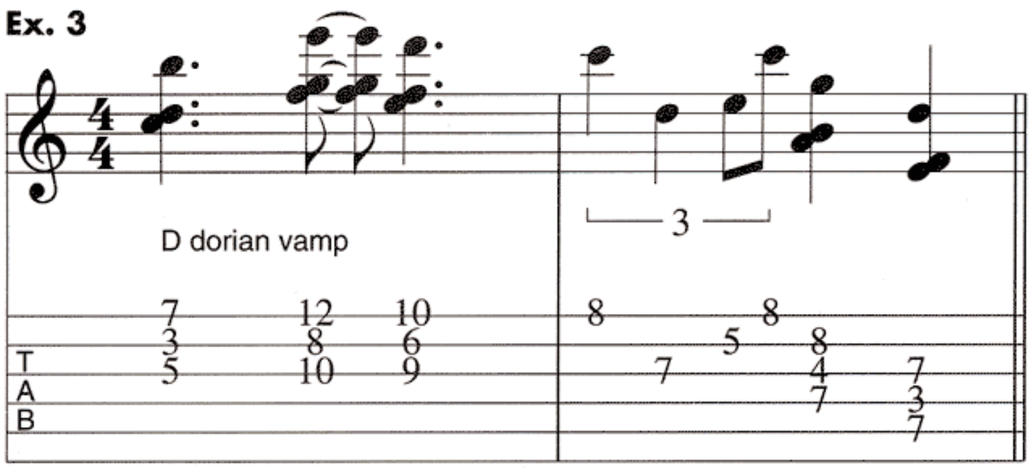
Building Intervallic Structures

BY MORRIS ACEVEDO

Ex. 1

Ex. 2



Ex. 3

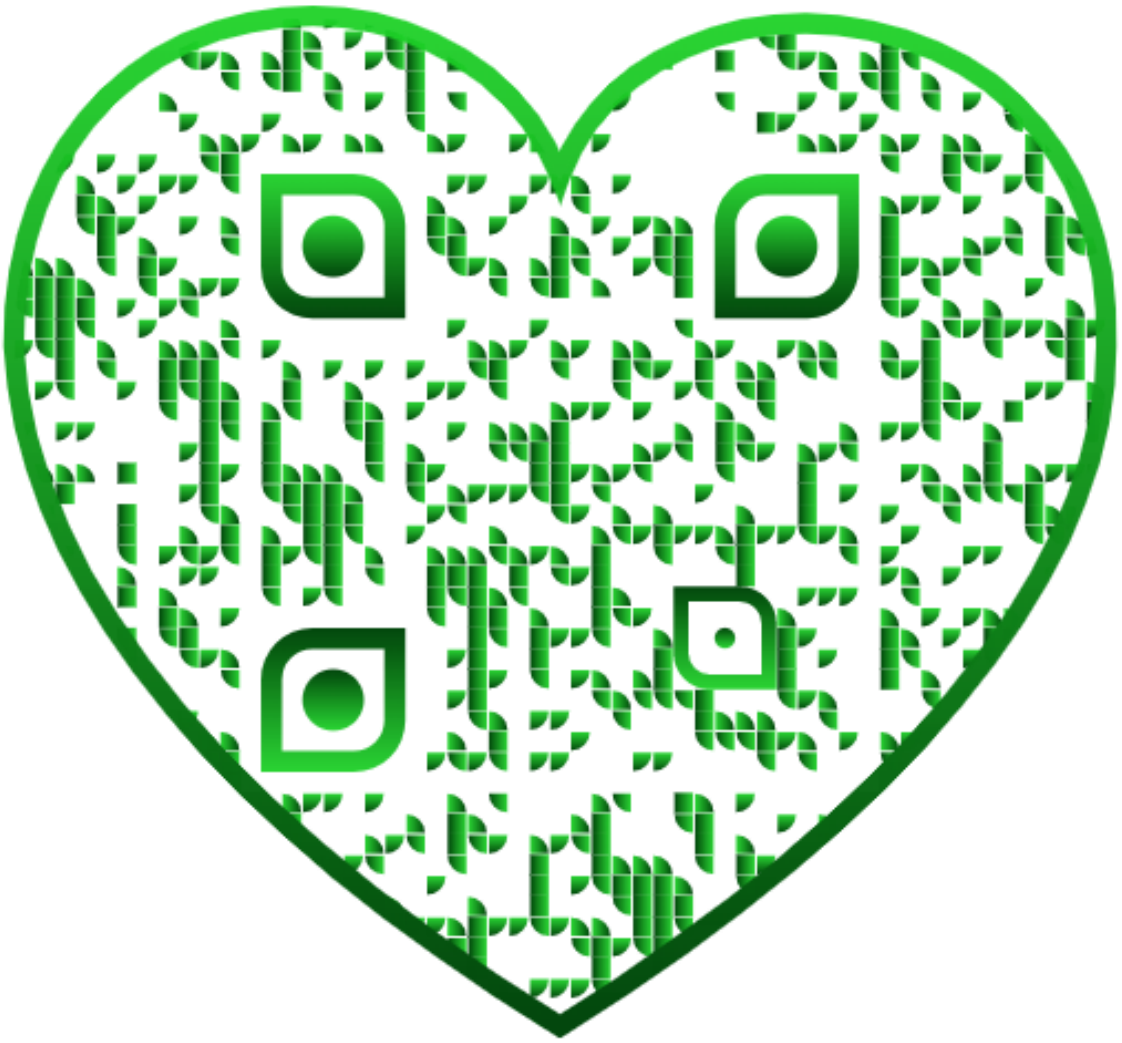


MOST OF THE CHORDS WE KNOW AND LOVE— major, minor, diminished and augmented triads, and 7th chords—are built on thirds. But you can also build chords by stacking notes in non-third intervals. I call them "intervallic structures," and on guitar they sound best in three-note groups.

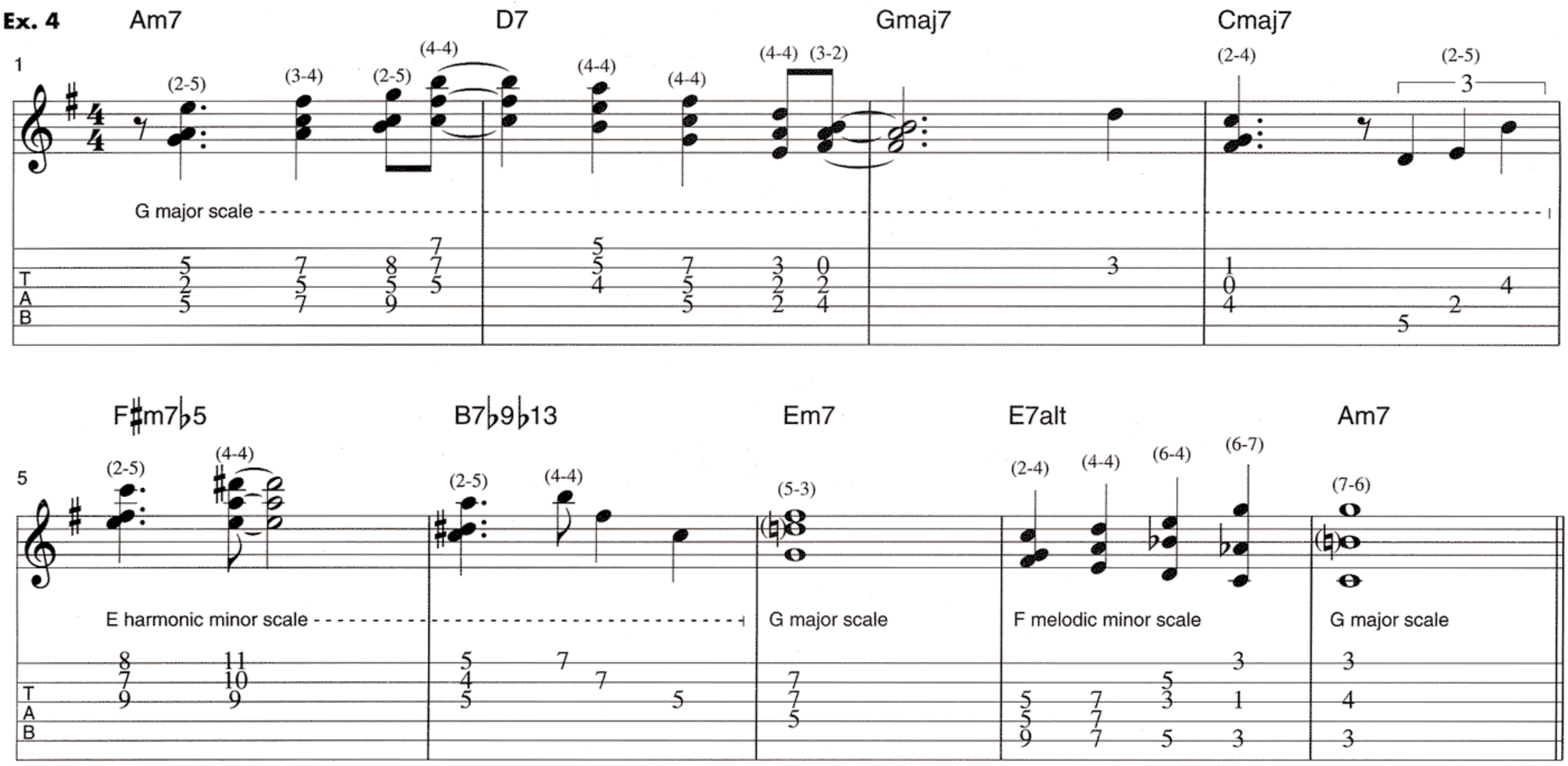
Here's how it works: First, choose a scale. Next, stack a note on top of the scale's tonic, and then stack another note on that. The structure must be diatonic—all the notes have to come from the scale. In Ex. 1 I've started with *C*, then gone up a major second to *D*, and then a major sixth from *D* to *B*. So I call this one a 2-6 structure. Find this structure on different three-string sets in different octaves. Now, staying on the same string set, move the structure up the scale (Ex. 2). Keep it diatonic, and notice how the tonal color changes while sounding neither major nor minor.

Now choose any *C* major scale degree and, using your new interval structures, create a vamp to improvise over. The note you choose gives the structure a modal reference point; in Ex. 3 it's *D* Dorian. Improvising on another scale tone makes the structure sound completely different. You can also play melodically. Ex. 4 uses several different structures to improvise over a chord progression. The scales I choose are listed.

Some of my favorite structures are 2-6, 2-4, 4-2, 7-7, 7-3 and 4-4 (à la McCoy Tyner). Avoid structures that have octave doublings; they just don't sound that interesting.



Ex. 4


Am7
D7
Gmaj7
Cmaj7
1
(2-5)
(3-4)
(2-5)
(4-4)
(4-4)
(4-4)
(4-4)
(3-2)
(2-4)
(2-5)
3
G major scale
T
A
B
F♯m7♭5
B7♭9♭13
Em7
E7alt
Am7
5
(2-5)
(4-4)
(2-5)
(4-4)
(5-3)
(2-4)
(4-4)
(6-4)
(6-7)
(7-6)
E harmonic minor scale
G major scale
F melodic minor scale
G major scale

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